

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAJ-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 IO-14 OMB-01 DRC-01 /117 W

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R 061857Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0904

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

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AMCONSUL HAMBURG

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: PARTY REACTION TO THE HAMBURG STATE ELECTION

REF: HAMBURG 0223

SUMMARY: THE REACTION IN BONN, WHERE ALL THREE MAJOR
PARTIES HAVE THEIR HEADQUARTERS, TO THE RESULTS OF THE
ELECTION IN HAMBURG (SEE REFTTEL) IS, PREDICTABLY,
ELATION ON THE PART OF THE CDU, DEJECTION AND SOME
ANGER ON THE PART OF THE SPD, AND SATISFACTION ON THE
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PART OF THE FDP. HOWEVER, THE ELECTION ALSO PRESENTS
THE FDP WITH A SERIES OF QUESTIONS MUCH EARLIER THAN

IT EXPECTED THEM, AND IT IS NOT LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO ANSWER THEM ANY TIME SOON. END SUMMARY.

1. THE SPD. ANTICIPATING LOSSES IN HAMBURG, THE SPD HAS FOR SOME TIME BEEN REFERRING TO THE "LOGICALLY INEVITABLE" SETBACKS IN LOCAL ELECTIONS A GOVERNING PARTY SUFFERS WHEN NO FEDERAL CAMPAIGN IS UNDERWAY, POINTING OUT THAT HAMBURG IS NOT BONN, AND LAMENTING HOW HARD IT IS TO LURE SPD VOTERS, PARTICULARLY IN BLUE COLLAR DISTRICTS, TO THE POLLS UNLESS THE ISSUES ARE EXCITING.

2. OF THESE SPD ATTEMPTS TO LESSEN THE MAGNITUDE OF THE HAMBURG LOSS ONLY THE LAST DESERVES COMMENT. IT IS TRUE THAT THE VOTER TURN-OUT IN WORKING CLASS DISTRICTS IS FREQUENTLY LESS THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE AND THAT THE SPD'S GREAT SUCCESS IN 1972 WAS DUE IN GREAT PART TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TRADE UNIONS IN GETTING OUT THE VOTE. BUT THE VOTER TURN-OUT MARCH 3 IN HAMBURG WAS HIGH. FURTHERMORE, HAMBURG IS NOT ONLY AN SPD STRONG-HOLD, IT IS THE HOME OF MANY OF THE SPD'S BEST KNOWN LEADERS--SCHMIDT, WEHNER, APEL. SO THE SPD IS FORCED TO LOOK WITHIN ITSELF FOR THE REASON AND THE CURE FOR ITS PROBLEMS. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER IT WILL BE WILLING TO DO SO.

3. THE PARTY HAS LACKED BOTH CLEAR DIRECTION AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR SOME TIME BUT HAS NEVERTHELESS BEEN TOO FLACCID TO DEBATE THE MATTER WITH ANY CONVICTION. THE SPD'S POPULARITY IS DOWN ALL OVER THE FRG, BUT THE CHANCELLOR'S IS STILL LOWER. THEREFORE, THERE HAS BEEN BICKERING IN THE SPD'S RANKS FOR SOME TIME AND HOPE EXPRESSED THAT WILLY WILL DO SOMETHING. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT HE WILL, HOWEVER, OR THAT HE KNOWS WHAT TO DO.

4. IN ANY CASE, BRANDT DOESN'T THINK HE IS THE PROBLEM. LAST WEEK HE TOLD THE FEDERAL COMMITTEE OF THE WORKERS' ASSOCIATION FOR LABOR QUESTIONS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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FAILED TO BRING THE TRUE VALUE OF ITS ACHIEVEMENTS TO THE PUBLIC AND ACCUSED HIS "REFORM MINISTERS"--I.E., DOHNANYI IN SCIENCE, EHMKE IN RESEARCH, VOGEL IN HOUSING, FOCKE IN HEALTH, ARENDT IN LABOR--OF NOT "SELLING" THEIR WORK TO THE PUBLIC.

5. SILENCE WOULD HAVE BEEN A BETTER DEFENSE. THE RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE "REFORM" MINISTERS HAVE BEEN EITHER TOO INSIGNIFICANT TO RECEIVE EVEN PARTISAN MENTION OR TOO CONFUSED--E.G., CO-DETERMINA-

TION AND UNIVERSITY REFORM--TO BE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD.
FURTHERMORE, ALL THOSE MENTIONED ARE SPD AND THUS HAVE
THEIR PORTFOLIOS BECAUSE BRANDT SO CHOSE. THEREFORE,
EVEN IF HIS COMPLAINT IS JUSTIFIED, IT IS A MATTER HE
CAN CHANGE AND, THUS, HE IS STILL AT THE CENTER OF THE
ARGUMENT. INDEED, TWO OF THOSE NAMED--EHMKE AND
DOHNANYI--HAVE NO POWER BASE TO JUSTIFY A PORTFOLIO AND
THUS ARE ENTIRELY THE CHANCELLOR'S CREATURES.

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SS-20 USIA-15 IO-14 OMB-01 DRC-01 /117 W

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R 061857Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0905

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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6. THERE IS NO SIGN AT THIS POINT, THEREFORE, THAT THE SPD HAS LEARNED MUCH FROM THE HAMBURG EVENTS. THE NEXT LAND ELECTION IS IN JUNE, AND THE SPD'S CHANCES OF LOSING CONTROL OF LOWER SAXONY THEN ARE GOOD.

7. THE CDU. NOTHING MUCH NEED BE SAID HERE, EXCEPT PERHAPS THAT THE REPUTATION OF BLUMENFELD AND ROLLMAN AS CAMPAIGNING POLITICIANS IS SO LOW IN BONN THAT
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CDU HEADQUARTERS IS CONVINCED THAT IT COULD ACTUALLY HAVE WON AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN HAMBURG WITH A MORE ATTRACTIVE LEADERSHIP. THE HAMBURG ELECTION LEAVES UNRESOLVED AND UNDIMINISHED THE CDU'S CENTRAL PROBLEM: WHO WILL LEAD IT WHITHER IN THE NEXT FEDERAL ELECTION? AS GERMAN POLITICS HAVE BECOME MORE AND MORE ENCAPSULATED IN PERSONALITIES, THE CDU'S PROBLEM HAS GROWN ACCORDINGLY. IT SIMPLY HAS NO STRONG LEADER TO PUT FORWARD IN 1976. SEVERAL HAMBURGS WON'T CHANGE THAT PROBLEM.

8. THE FDP. THE FDP'S GAIN OF SOME FOUR PERCENTAGE POINTS IS BOTH TOO LITTLE AND TOO MUCH--TOO MUCH TO LEAVE ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SPD UNCHANGED AND TOO LITTLE TO MAKE ITS FUTURE PATH EASY TO FIGURE. HERE TOO THE HIGH VOTER TURN-OUT HAS GUTTED ANOTHER CONVENIENT, HEURISTIC FICTION, PARTICULARLY AS NATIONAL POLLS PUT THE FDP AT 14 PER CENT INSTEAD OF THE TEN PLUS PER CENT ACHIEVED AT HAMBURG. IN SHORT, ACCORDING TO MOST FDP STRATEGISTS, A HIGH TURN-OUT PLUS SPD LOSSES SHOULD HAVE GIVEN THE FDP CONSIDERABLY MORE THAN IT IN FACT RECEIVED BECAUSE THE FDP'S 1972 GAINS WERE CLEARLY AT SPD EXPENSE. THUS THERE IS ON THE DAY AFTER HAMBURG THE FEAR THAT THE SPD'S DECLINE MAY ULTIMATELY PROVE NOT TO BE THE SOURCE OF NEW FDP STRENGTH BUT RATHER, BY CONTAMINATION, THE PRELUDE OF DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE FDP AS WELL, PARTICULARLY AS RECENT POLLS ALSO SHOW INCREASING VOTER INABILITY TO DISTINGUISH ONE COALITION PARTNER FROM THE OTHER EXCEPT IN NAME.

9. 1966 IS AT THE MOMENT THE POSSIBLE ANALOGY OF GREATEST CONCERN. THEN THE FDP, IN COALITION WITH THE CDU, ALMOST WENT UNDER WITH ERHARD, FOLLOWING A SMALL RECESSION ACCOMPANIED BY GREAT PUBLIC ANXIETY. THE FDP DESERTED ERHARD TO SAVE ITSELF AND IN SO DOING BECAME THE SOLE PARTY IN OPPOSITION DURING THE GRAND COALITION. THE FDP COULD, OF COURSE, DESERT BRANDT IF THE SPD'S PROSPECTS DARKEN FURTHER, BUT WHETHER IT WOULD, SO SOON AFTER ITS BASIC SHIFT IN 1966, SURVIVE THE LOSS IN

CREDIBILITY WHICH ANOTHER MAJOR SHIFT WOULD ENTAIL, NOT
TO MENTION THE INTRA-PARTY BLOOD-LETTING THAT WOULD BE
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PART OF IT, IS HIGHLY DEBATABLE.

10. THUS, THE FDP'S "VICTORY" AT HAMBURG HAS CAUSED
LESS JOY IN FACT THAN THE FDP PRESENTLY FEIGNS, PARTI-
CULARLY AS IT TOO IS EFFECTIVELY LEADERLESS AT THE
MOMENT AS SCHEEL WAITS TO BECOME FEDERAL PRESIDENT WHILE
THE MORE CONSERVATIVE, MORE PRAGMATIC GENSCHER IS STILL
STANDING IN THE WINGS.

11. CONCLUSION. THE SPD LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN FRANK TO
ADMIT PUBLICLY WHAT IS IN ANY EVENT CRYSTAL CLEAR,
NAMELY THAT THE PARTY SUFFERED A MAJOR REVERSAL IN
HAMBURG AND MUST NOW CARRY OUT A SEARCHING ANALYSIS TO
ESTABLISH WHAT WENT WRONG AND TO PLOT A COURSE FOR THE
FUTURE. (SPD VICE CHAIRMAN KUEHN, WHO IS ALSO MINISTER
PRESIDENT OF NORTH RHEIN WESTPHALIA, TOLD THE AMBASSADOR
THAT HE, BRANDT AND WEHNER WILL HAVE AN EXTENDED MEETING
MARCH 6 WITH THESE ENDS IN VIEW.) CLEARLY THE SPD WILL
HAVE TO PULL UP ITS SOCKS IF IT IS TO AVOID FURTHER
DECLINE IN VOTER POPULARITY. THERE ARE MANY FACTORS TO
CONSIDER, BUT THE KEY TO THE PROBLEM IS BRANDT HIMSELF.
IF HE CAN REASSERT HIMSELF AND GIVE HIS PARTY THE LEAD
THAT HAS BEEN SO BADLY MISSING OF LATE, THE SPD COULD
MOVE AWAY FROM THE HAMBURG DEBACLE RESOLVED AT LEAST
TO PULL ITSELF TOGETHER AND FIGHT. BRANDT IS KNOWN AS
A MAN OF MOODS. IF THE PASSIVE, LETHARGIC PHASE OF
THE PAST MONTHS CONTINUES, THE SPD'S PROSPECTS IN THE
COMING LANDTAG ELECTIONS (LOWER SAXONY IN JUNE, AND
HESSE AND BAVARIA IN NOVEMBER) WILL SUFFER. AND BEYOND
THIS, THE POLITICAL PICTURE FOR 1976 WILL ALSO BE
ADVERSELY AFFECTED FOR THE SPD.
HILLENBRAND

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 MAR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BONN03606
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: BONN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740365/aaaaciho.tel
Line Count: 262
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: HAMBURG 0223
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 MAR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <28 MAR 2002 by collinp0>; APPROVED <04 JUN 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PARTY REACTION TO THE HAMBURG STATE ELECTION
TAGS: PINT, GE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005